

All 10 towns, 4 villages join county in seeking more state funds for roads and bridges



Photo by Tom Rivers

The Allens Bridge Road canal bridge in Albion has a weight limit of 7 tons. It is one of several canal bridges that can not carry heavy trucks.

By Tom Rivers, Editor Posted 29 August 2014

It doesn't happen very often but the elected town, village and county boards are united on an issue. They have all passed formal resolutions for more state funding for roads and bridges.

The money is already there, said Legislator Ken DeRoller, R-Kendall, but the state diverts funding for roads and bridges to other purposes.

The County Legislature, 10 Town Boards and four Village Boards in the county have all formally approved resolutions "Urging Structural Reform of the State Dedicated Highway and Bridge Trust Fund." Carlton was the most recent to approve the resolution, making it unanimous among the elected municipal boards.

Taxpayers pay billions into the Highway and Bridge Trust Fund through taxes and fees but 75 percent of the money is then "siphoned off to pay for borrowing and operating costs of state agencies, leaving fewer dollars for improving our infrastructure," according to the resolution.

The local government leaders are urging the governor and State Legislature to develop a multi-year plan for the fund to meet the infrastructure needs for bridges and roads in the state.

This is only the second time all municipal boards in the county have passed the same resolution. The boards did it for the first time last year in opposing the SAFE Act, a gun control law approved by Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the State Legislature in January 2013.

The county, towns and villages also have been pressing the state to better maintain bridges in the county. The canal bridges are particularly worrisome, officials said. There are 26 canal bridges in the county, including seven lift bridges.

Twelve of the 26 bridges have been declared “functionally obsolete.” Another six are considered “structurally deficient” by the state Department of Transportation. Two are closed – Brown Street in Albion and Hindsburg Road in Murray. The Knowlesville lift bridge is limited to one lane and 6 tons.

Other bridges have reduced weight limits below 10 tons, including Transit Road in Albion at 9 tons, Allens Bridge Road in Albion at 7 tons, Presbyterian Road in Albion at 5 tons, and Groth Road at 9 tons in Murray. Most of the bridges are about 100 years old. They were installed when the canal was widened in 1909 to 1914.

The closed and weight-reduced bridges forces longer trips for school buses, fire trucks, tractor trailers and big farm equipment, hindering public safety and commerce in the county, legislators said.

With less state funding for bridges, the county is considering using more local dollars for infrastructure projects so more bridges aren't closed in the near future. That will put the burden of the projects on local taxpayers.

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